## WHEN THERE IS CONFLICT. . . A GUIDE

Here are some steps to facilitate resolution of conflicts. These steps are numbered, but it is rarely a step-by-step process. You may have to go back and forth until people can agree. These steps are designed to help you work through an issue, decision, or plan. *Personal* conflicts may be eased with some of these approaches, but should probably be addressed in private.

- 1. Expect conflict in highly stressful situations.
- 2. Always ask parents about their child before you tell them anything.
- 3. Listen for the real message behind the words.
- 4. Analyze the resistance: anger is most often a response to perceived or real threats and concerns. Your task is to identify the threat and reduce it.
- 5. Know and share your own values and expectations.
  - □ "I know we cannot reach full agreement on this IEP today, but I would like to see if we can come to agreement on [the first section] [a first draft] [the areas where we agree/disagree]."
- 6. Understand everyone's interests.
- 7. Identify the real problem or issue.
  - Write down the issue or proposal if you can. This will focus the attention of the group and can narrow the scope of the conflict. Use an overhead projector, dry-erase board, or laptop. Always have someone available to type and distribute the revisions.
  - "Help me understand your point of view." "Go back over that again, so I am sure I heard you." "Which part of the plan does not suit you?" "Tell us where you see a problem." "Which part of the schedule do you want to change?" "Which office do you mean?"
- 8. List the possible solutions or decisions.
  - Allow time for brainstorming, if appropriate.
  - Consider combining solutions and options.
- 9. Highlight your common ground.

- □ "Let's take this step-by-step and see what we can agree on."
- 10. If you cannot find common ground, find the common process for solving the problem.
  - □ Take turns giving everyone a chance to speak, with time limits or topic limits "We are going to spend the next ten minutes discussing the first concern only. Who would like to be our timekeeper?"
- 11. Take the pulse of the group.
  - "Could we take a short break to see how people are feeling about this discussion? Let's go around the room and see if anyone has a suggestion about improving our process."
- 12. Document the agreements and "park" the disagreements.
  - □ "I notice that we have already spent 30 minutes on this proposal. People seem to be getting frustrated. What if we put this set of problems on the discussion "parking lot" and move to the next section? We will return to the parking lot issues before we adjourn. We may hit on solutions later that help us resolve this impasse."

Just remember...



## When elephants fight, the grass suffers.

-African proverb

## Additional Resources

Brinkman, R. & Kirschner, R. (1994) <u>Dealing with people you can't stand.</u> New York: McGraw-Hill.

DeBoer, A. (1997). Working together: The art of consulting and communicating. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Strayhorn, J. (1977) Talking it out: A guide to communication and problem solving. Champaign, IL: Research Press.